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CIA after Casey

Critics say it's time to unsaddle agency that openly tilts too often with Congress

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WASHINGTON—William J. Casey, fighting to overcome the effects of a cancerous brain tumor, resigned from the Central Intelligence Agency last week, ending a six-year term as chief of the American intelligence apparatus.

If the people of the United States thought the CIA was a secret agency moving deftly to assess the world's dangers and carry out an occasional discreet operation, the news coverage of the director's resignation alone should dispel this notion.

The CIA under Casey has been one of the most visible parts of the Reagan administration. It directs or supplies more men and women in combat than the Department of Defense. At this juncture, the CIA is funding and influencing wars in Afghanistan, Central America, Cambodia and Angola and has dabbled in Chad and Ethiopia.

As new information about the sale of arms to Iran and diversion of money to rebels fighting in Nicaragua comes out, Casey emerges as far more knowledgeable and influential in the administration than either the secretary of defense or the secretary of state.

His battles with Congress are far better known than any jousts by George Shultz, the secretary of state, and Casey attended more political festivities and embassy get-togethers than almost any other Reagan administration figure.

Were the former director able to grant an interview, he would likely note gruffly that it is the news media in search of sensationalism that have kept him and his agency at center stage. In part, of

course, he would be correct. Espionage and secret wars are romantic stuff and far more interesting to the reader or viewer than the federal budget.

But the agency's very visibility suggests it may be the right time to reassess what sort of intelligence apparatus the U.S. really needs.

Casey has been widely credited with restoring the morale of the CIA and the other agencies of what is called the "intelligence community," an amalgamation of defense and security organizations. His influence on and access to President Reagan are said to have won significant budget increases for intelligence activities, and he is said to have improved the intelligence "product," the assessments of problems the CIA supplies to policymakers.

Historically, the CIA's primary function was to gather and organize intelligence to give the president and the key policymakers objective data upon which to base national security and foreign policy decisions.

Before World War II, intelligence flowed into the White House and the Cabinet in separate streams from the military forces and the State Department. It was often contradictory and sometimes driven by the bureaucratic ambitions of the agencies that provided it.

The CIA, it was hoped, would give an evenhanded report because it was not trying to buy tanks or get more money for an aircraft budget

tro. From the beginning, the CIA has also been asked to conduct "covert actions," secret operations designed to further American policy. They've ranged over the years from trying to buy an Italian election to seeing if an exploding cigar might kill Fidel Cas-

tro.

CIA agents were willing recruits to covert action. Most of the original leadership, like Casey, had served in the Office of Strategic Services, the World War II precursor of the CIA and an agency that mainly conducted covert operations.

Congressional investigations in the 1970s exposed some of the less well-thought-out covert actions, and between these disclosures and the nation's weariness with the Vietnam escapade, support and funds for CIA covert action dried up.

Casey has restored much of the agency's ability to conduct secret operations, and from this has flowed the contra war in Nicaragua and as many as 50 other operations. Morton Halperin, a former analyst in President Richard Nixon's White House and a strong critic of covert action, saw the Casey-Reagan program as "anachronistic," as though the two men came to Washington in the 1980s as full-blown "cold warriors from 1949."

The Casey doctrine is based upon a single conclusion: that the Soviet Union directs a worldwide campaign to win support in the Third World through revolution or armed struggle. The U.S., as Casey sees it, must counter this worldwide offensive.

With support of the President, he has led his agency into this battle. But what bothers many on Capitol Hill is that if the CIA is an action agency, with a battle plan of covert actions, can it continue to supply objective intelligence on the regions where it is at war?

Nicaragua is an example. Should the agency that has been funding a five-year effort to interdict arms shipments and overthrow the Sandinista government over the objections of many in Congress be the one to evaluate the need for such a war?

The questions about Casey and covert operations go deeper still. The Reagan administration has relied heavily on this technique and many of its operations are paramilitary, simply "undeclared wars," as New York's Democratic Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan argues.

A covert action, in effect, is a foreign policy decision that can short-circuit Congress and public debate. The president is required to notify Congress of these actions in a "timely" fashion, but this forces those who might oppose them to try to change the action after the fact.

In the secret arms sales to Iran, for instance, Congress did not learn of the gambit until almost 18 months after Reagan authorized the weapons shipments.

Because covert operations have dominated Reagan policy in so many regions—the Middle East, Central America and Africa—it means a good deal of American foreign policy is being directed in secrecy.

Moreover, the "secrecy" is really more often only secret from Congress and the American people.

The paramilitary covert operations are virtually impossible to conduct secretly in a modern world. The romantic notion that giant, unmarked C-130s carrying arms can fly around unnoticed is fanciful at best.

While Casey's CIA has centered its attention on covert operations, there is a question whether other, more traditional intelligence gathering has suffered. The answer may never be known, but there are dismaying signs of difficulty.

The Vitaly Yurchenko case is an example. Originally, Yurchenko would seem to have been a Western intelligence coup. A senior KGB officer, Yurchenko defected to the U.S. in 1985 and was supplying valuable information when he suddenly redefected to the Soviet Union. Well-placed intelligence experts charged that Yurchenko was mishandled by the CIA. The agency claims it may have been duped by a skillful propaganda operation.

Either way, the CIA came out looking crude and unsophisticated.

Edward Lee Howard is another uncomfortable example. Howard was being groomed to be a CIA operative in Moscow, which clearly has to be the first team of American intelligence officers. Shortly before he was to complete his training for Moscow, Howard was fired and no attempt was made to keep in touch with him or to secure the information about CIA operations that he carried in his head.

Howard defected and sold the Soviets the names of several agents in Moscow.

A House committee has concluded that it was one of the nation's worst counterintelligence fail-

U.S. intelligence directors

Rear Adm. Sidney W. Souers

Jan. 23-June 16, 1946; former deputy chief of coast intelligence; appointed by President Truman to organize National Intelligence Authority, a successor of the Office of Strategic Services.

Lt. Gen. Hoyt H. Vandenberg

June 16, 1946-May 1, 1947; called one of the chief architects of air and ground cooperation in World War II; appointed to NIA by President Truman.

Rear Adm. Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter

May 1, 1947-Oct. 7, 1950; set up wartime intelligence network in the Pacific; appointed by President Truman to head the new CIA; established by National Security Act of 1947.

Gen. Walter Bedell Smith

Oct. 7, 1950-Feb. 9, 1953; chief of staff to Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower in World War II, ambassador to Russia, 1946-49; appointed CIA director by President Truman.

Allen W. Dulles

Feb. 26, 1953-Nov. 23, 1961; lawyer, diplomat, chief of the Office of Strategic Services in Switzerland and Europe; appointed by President Eisenhower.

John McCone

Nov. 23, 1961-April 28, 1965; Republican businessman, chairman of

the Atomic Energy Commission; appointed by President Kennedy.

Vice Adm. William P. Rogers Jr.

April 28, 1966-June 30, 1969; career navy; appointed by President Johnson.

Richard Helms

June 30, 1969-Feb. 2, 1973; first career officer to head CIA; appointed by President Johnson.

James R. Schlesinger

Feb. 2, 1973-July 2, 1973; economist, government official; appointed by President Nixon.

William E. Casey

Sept. 4, 1973-Jan. 30, 1976; joined CIA in 1960; appointed by President Nixon.

George Bush

Jan. 30, 1976-Jan. 20, 1977; Republican congressman; appointed by President Ford.

Adm. Stanfield Turner

March 9, 1977-Jan. 20, 1981; Naval Academy classmate of Jimmy Carter; appointed by President Carter.

William J. Casey

Jan. 28, 1981-Jan. 29, 1987; lawyer, government official who was Ronald Reagan's campaign manager; appointed by President Reagan.

Robert M. Gates

Acting director named Jan. 29, 1987; career CIA; appointed by President Reagan.

Chicago Tribune graphic;

Sources: Chicago Tribune news reports, Central Intelligence Agency

ures, in part because the CIA had failed to evaluate Howard's unsuitability to be an agent and in part because there was no follow-up after he was fired to see that he did not compromise his country.

Instead of simply approving the appointment of Casey's deputy, Robert Gates, as the new director, there are some in Congress who think this may be the time to reassess what kind of agency the nation wants the CIA to be.